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CHAPTER X

COORG (Contd.)

241 THE principal occupation of the Coorgs is agriculture. Wet land cultivation predominates, but cultivation in dry and high lands is also made for the maintenance of large united families with numerous dependents. Agriculture is of a rude type and is similar to that prevailing in other parts of India. It is a system of rural economy formed at a remote period and transmitted for ages unchanged. Wedded to primitive modes of cultivation, the Coorg views with disapprobation any attempts at innovation. The industry of the people of the Highlands is confined exclusively to rice. The narrow valleys between the high grounds are very productive. The agricultural implements are of a rude type. And yet the yield has furnished an unfailing supply from ancient times both for consumption and for export to Malabar. Wherever practicable, the valleys have been formed into flat terraces for cultivation.

243 782 [221] [354] The agricultural year begins about the middle of April. With the onset of the first showers in April or May, the ploughing commences. On an auspicious day before sunrise, the house lamp, *Tali-akki-baleke* (dish-rice-lamp) which plays a conspicuous role on all festive occasions, is lighted in the inner verandah, the members of the family assemble and invoke the blessings of their ancestors and Kaveri Amma. The young men make obeisance to their parents and elders and drive a pair of bullocks to the paddy fields, where they turn the heads of them to the east. The landlord now offers coconuts and plantains, rice and milk to the presiding deity of his Nad and lifting up his hands to the rising sun, he invokes his blessings. The oxen are yoked and three furrows are ploughed, when he takes a clod to the granary, and offers his prayers to Siva to grant him an increase of one hundred times. From 6 to 10 in the morning the ploughing is continued in the fields and turned two or three times. Then the borders are trimmed, the channels are cleaned, and the little banks repaired to regulate water.

243 [221] Regulated by the monsoon rain, the rice-transplanting takes place during July and August. The women covered with gorakas, which rest on the head and protect the whole body, pull out the plants from the nursery and tie them in small bundles which are collected in one spot. Meanwhile, the submerged fields are repeatedly ploughed and levelled, till the soil becomes as soft as treacle. All the members of the family standing in a line knee deep [474] in the muddy fields begin the transplanting. The bundles are conveniently deposited in the field, and each man takes a handful of plants at a time into his left hand, and presses into the mud with great rapidity seven or eight